

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

### IN PERSPECTIVE

#### Part 1

About four years and a quarter later--to be exact, it was four years and four months--Mr. and Mrs. Capes stood side by side upon an old Persian carpet that did duty as a hearthrug in the dining-room of their flat and surveyed a shining dinner-table set for four people, lit by skilfully-shaded electric lights, brightened by frequent gleams of silver, and carefully and simply adorned with sweet-pea blossom. Capes had altered scarcely at all during the interval, except for a new quality of smartness in the cut of his clothes, but Ann Veronica was nearly half an inch taller; her face was at once stronger and softer, her neck firmer and rounder, and her carriage definitely more womanly than it had been in the days of her rebellion. She was a woman now to the tips of her fingers; she had said good-bye to her girlhood in the old garden four years and a quarter ago. She was dressed in a simple evening gown of soft creamy silk, with a yoke of dark old embroidery that enhanced the gentle gravity of her style, and her black hair flowed off her open forehead to pass under the control of a simple ribbon of silver. A silver necklace enhanced the dusky beauty of her neck. Both husband and wife affected an unnatural ease of manner for the benefit of

the efficient parlor-maid, who was putting the finishing touches to the sideboard arrangements.

"It looks all right," said Capes.

"I think everything's right," said Ann Veronica, with the roaming eye of a capable but not devoted house-mistress.

"I wonder if they will seem altered," she remarked for the third time.

"There I can't help," said Capes.

He walked through a wide open archway, curtained with deep-blue curtains, into the apartment that served as a reception-room. Ann Veronica, after a last survey of the dinner appointments, followed him, rustling, came to his side by the high brass fender, and touched two or three ornaments on the mantel above the cheerful fireplace.

"It's still a marvel to me that we are to be forgiven," she said, turning.

"My charm of manner, I suppose. But, indeed, he's very human."

"Did you tell him of the registry office?"

"No--o--certainly not so emphatically as I did about the play."

"It was an inspiration--your speaking to him?"

"I felt impudent. I believe I am getting impudent. I had not been near the Royal Society since--since you disgraced me. What's that?"

They both stood listening. It was not the arrival of the guests, but merely the maid moving about in the hall.

"Wonderful man!" said Ann Veronica, reassured, and stroking his cheek with her finger.

Capes made a quick movement as if to bite that aggressive digit, but it withdrew to Ann Veronica's side.

"I was really interested in his stuff. I WAS talking to him before I saw his name on the card beside the row of microscopes. Then, naturally, I went on talking. He--he has rather a poor opinion of his contemporaries. Of course, he had no idea who I was."

"But how did you tell him? You've never told me. Wasn't it--a little bit of a scene?"

"Oh! let me see. I said I hadn't been at the Royal Society soiree for four years, and got him to tell me about some of the fresh Mendelian work. He loves the Mendelians because he hates all the big names of

the eighties and nineties. Then I think I remarked that science was disgracefully under-endowed, and confessed I'd had to take to more profitable courses. 'The fact of it is,' I said, 'I'm the new playwright, Thomas More. Perhaps you've heard--?' Well, you know, he had."

"Fame!"

"Isn't it? I've not seen your play, Mr. More,' he said, 'but I'm told it's the most amusing thing in London at the present time. A friend of mine, Ogilvy'--I suppose that's Ogilvy & Ogilvy, who do so many divorces, Vee?--'was speaking very highly of it--very highly!" He smiled into her eyes.

"You are developing far too retentive a memory for praises," said Ann Veronica.

"I'm still new to them. But after that it was easy. I told him instantly and shamelessly that the play was going to be worth ten thousand pounds. He agreed it was disgraceful. Then I assumed a rather portentous manner to prepare him."

"How? Show me."

"I can't be portentous, dear, when you're about. It's my other side of the moon. But I was portentous, I can assure you. 'My name's NOT More,

Mr. Stanley,' I said. 'That's my pet name.'"

"Yes?"

"I think--yes, I went on in a pleasing blend of the casual and sotto voce, 'The fact of it is, sir, I happen to be your son-in-law, Capes. I do wish you could come and dine with us some evening. It would make my wife very happy.'"

"What did he say?"

"What does any one say to an invitation to dinner point-blank? One tries to collect one's wits. 'She is constantly thinking of you,' I said."

"And he accepted meekly?"

"Practically. What else could he do? You can't kick up a scene on the spur of the moment in the face of such conflicting values as he had before him. With me behaving as if everything was infinitely matter-of-fact, what could he do? And just then Heaven sent old Manningtree--I didn't tell you before of the fortunate intervention of Manningtree, did I? He was looking quite infernally distinguished, with a wide crimson ribbon across him--what IS a wide crimson ribbon? Some sort of knight, I suppose. He is a knight. 'Well, young man,' he said, 'we haven't seen you lately,' and something about 'Bateson & Co.'--he's frightfully anti-Mendelian--having it all their own way. So I introduced

him to my father-in-law like a shot. I think that WAS decision. Yes, it was Manningtree really secured your father. He--"

"Here they are!" said Ann Veronica as the bell sounded.

## Part 2

They received the guests in their pretty little hall with genuine effusion. Miss Stanley threw aside a black cloak to reveal a discreet and dignified arrangement of brown silk, and then embraced Ann Veronica with warmth. "So very clear and cold," she said. "I feared we might have a fog." The housemaid's presence acted as a useful restraint. Ann Veronica passed from her aunt to her father, and put her arms about him and kissed his cheek. "Dear old daddy!" she said, and was amazed to find herself shedding tears. She veiled her emotion by taking off his overcoat. "And this is Mr. Capes?" she heard her aunt saying.

All four people moved a little nervously into the drawing-room, maintaining a sort of fluttered amiability of sound and movement.

Mr. Stanley professed a great solicitude to warm his hands. "Quite unusually cold for the time of year," he said. "Everything very nice, I am sure," Miss Stanley murmured to Capes as he steered her to a place

upon the little sofa before the fire. Also she made little pussy-like sounds of a reassuring nature.

"And let's have a look at you, Vee!" said Mr. Stanley, standing up with a sudden geniality and rubbing his hands together.

Ann Veronica, who knew her dress became her, dropped a curtsy to her father's regard.

Happily they had no one else to wait for, and it heartened her mightily to think that she had ordered the promptest possible service of the dinner. Capes stood beside Miss Stanley, who was beaming unnaturally, and Mr. Stanley, in his effort to seem at ease, took entire possession of the hearthrug.

"You found the flat easily?" said Capes in the pause. "The numbers are a little difficult to see in the archway. They ought to put a lamp."

Her father declared there had been no difficulty.

"Dinner is served, m'm," said the efficient parlor-maid in the archway, and the worst was over.

"Come, daddy," said Ann Veronica, following her husband and Miss Stanley; and in the fulness of her heart she gave a friendly squeeze to the parental arm.

"Excellent fellow!" he answered a little irrelevantly. "I didn't understand, Vee."

"Quite charming apartments," Miss Stanley admired; "charming! Everything is so pretty and convenient."

The dinner was admirable as a dinner; nothing went wrong, from the golden and excellent clear soup to the delightful iced marrons and cream; and Miss Stanley's praises died away to an appreciative acquiescence. A brisk talk sprang up between Capes and Mr. Stanley, to which the two ladies subordinated themselves intelligently. The burning topic of the Mendelian controversy was approached on one or two occasions, but avoided dexterously; and they talked chiefly of letters and art and the censorship of the English stage. Mr. Stanley was inclined to think the censorship should be extended to the supply of what he styled latter-day fiction; good wholesome stories were being ousted, he said, by "vicious, corrupting stuff" that "left a bad taste in the mouth." He declared that no book could be satisfactory that left a bad taste in the mouth, however much it seized and interested the reader at the time. He did not like it, he said, with a significant look, to be reminded of either his books or his dinners after he had done with them. Capes agreed with the utmost cordiality.

"Life is upsetting enough, without the novels taking a share," said Mr. Stanley.



For a time Ann Veronica's attention was diverted by her aunt's interest in the salted almonds.

"Quite particularly nice," said her aunt. "Exceptionally so."

When Ann Veronica could attend again she found the men were discussing the ethics of the depreciation of house property through the increasing tumult of traffic in the West End, and agreeing with each other to a devastating extent. It came into her head with real emotional force that this must be some particularly fantastic sort of dream. It seemed to her that her father was in some inexplicable way meaner-looking than she had supposed, and yet also, as unaccountably, appealing. His tie had demanded a struggle; he ought to have taken a clean one after his first failure. Why was she noting things like this? Capes seemed self-possessed and elaborately genial and commonplace, but she knew him to be nervous by a little occasional clumsiness, by the faintest shadow of vulgarity in the urgency of his hospitality. She wished he could smoke and dull his nerves a little. A gust of irrational impatience blew through her being. Well, they'd got to the pheasants, and in a little while he would smoke. What was it she had expected? Surely her moods were getting a little out of hand.

She wished her father and aunt would not enjoy their dinner with such quiet determination. Her father and her husband, who had both been a little pale at their first encounter, were growing now just faintly

flushed. It was a pity people had to eat food.

"I suppose," said her father, "I have read at least half the novels that have been at all successful during the last twenty years. Three a week is my allowance, and, if I get short ones, four. I change them in the morning at Cannon Street, and take my book as I come down."

It occurred to her that she had never seen her father dining out before, never watched him critically as an equal. To Capes he was almost deferential, and she had never seen him deferential in the old time, never. The dinner was stranger than she had ever anticipated. It was as if she had grown right past her father into something older and of infinitely wider outlook, as if he had always been unsuspectedly a flattened figure, and now she had discovered him from the other side.

It was a great relief to arrive at last at that pause when she could say to her aunt, "Now, dear?" and rise and hold back the curtain through the archway. Capes and her father stood up, and her father made a belated movement toward the curtain. She realized that he was the sort of man one does not think much about at dinners. And Capes was thinking that his wife was a supremely beautiful woman. He reached a silver cigar and cigarette box from the sideboard and put it before his father-in-law, and for a time the preliminaries of smoking occupied them both. Then Capes flittered to the hearthrug and poked the fire, stood up, and turned about. "Ann Veronica is looking very well, don't you think?" he said, a little awkwardly.

"Very," said Mr. Stanley. "Very," and cracked a walnut appreciatively.

"Life--things--I don't think her prospects now--Hopeful outlook."

"You were in a difficult position," Mr. Stanley pronounced, and seemed to hesitate whether he had not gone too far. He looked at his port wine as though that tawny ruby contained the solution of the matter. "All's well that ends well," he said; "and the less one says about things the better."

"Of course," said Capes, and threw a newly lit cigar into the fire through sheer nervousness. "Have some more port wine, sir?"

"It's a very sound wine," said Mr. Stanley, consenting with dignity.

"Ann Veronica has never looked quite so well, I think," said Capes, clinging, because of a preconceived plan, to the suppressed topic.

### Part 3

At last the evening was over, and Capes and his wife had gone down to see Mr. Stanley and his sister into a taxicab, and had waved an amiable

farewell from the pavement steps.

"Great dears!" said Capes, as the vehicle passed out of sight.

"Yes, aren't they?" said Ann Veronica, after a thoughtful pause. And then, "They seem changed."

"Come in out of the cold," said Capes, and took her arm.

"They seem smaller, you know, even physically smaller," she said.

"You've grown out of them.... Your aunt liked the pheasant."

"She liked everything. Did you hear us through the archway, talking cookery?"

They went up by the lift in silence.

"It's odd," said Ann Veronica, re-entering the flat.

"What's odd?"

"Oh, everything!"

She shivered, and went to the fire and poked it. Capes sat down in the arm-chair beside her.

"Life's so queer," she said, kneeling and looking into the flames. "I wonder--I wonder if we shall ever get like that."

She turned a firelit face to her husband. "Did you tell him?"

Capes smiled faintly. "Yes."

"How?"

"Well--a little clumsily."

"But how?"

"I poured him out some port wine, and I said--let me see--oh, 'You are going to be a grandfather!'"

"Yes. Was he pleased?"

"Calmly! He said--you won't mind my telling you?"

"Not a bit."

"He said, 'Poor Alice has got no end!'"

"Alice's are different," said Ann Veronica, after an interval. "Quite

different. She didn't choose her man.... Well, I told aunt....

Husband of mine, I think we have rather overrated the emotional capacity of those--those dears."

"What did your aunt say?"

"She didn't even kiss me. She said"--Ann Veronica shivered again--"I hope it won't make you uncomfortable, my dear'--like that--'and whatever you do, do be careful of your hair!' I think--I judge from her manner--that she thought it was just a little indelicate of us--considering everything; but she tried to be practical and sympathetic and live down to our standards."

Capes looked at his wife's unsmiling face.

"Your father," he said, "remarked that all's well that ends well, and that he was disposed to let bygones be bygones. He then spoke with a certain fatherly kindness of the past...."

"And my heart has ached for him!"

"Oh, no doubt it cut him at the time. It must have cut him."

"We might even have--given it up for them!"

"I wonder if we could."

"I suppose all IS well that ends well. Somehow to-night--I don't know."

"I suppose so. I'm glad the old sore is assuaged. Very glad. But if we had gone under--!"

They regarded one another silently, and Ann Veronica had one of her penetrating flashes.

"We are not the sort that goes under," said Ann Veronica, holding her hands so that the red reflections vanished from her eyes. "We settled long ago--we're hard stuff. We're hard stuff!"

Then she went on: "To think that is my father! Oh, my dear! He stood over me like a cliff; the thought of him nearly turned me aside from everything we have done. He was the social order; he was law and wisdom. And they come here, and they look at our furniture to see if it is good; and they are not glad, it does not stir them, that at last, at last we can dare to have children."

She dropped back into a crouching attitude and began to weep. "Oh, my dear!" she cried, and suddenly flung herself, kneeling, into her husband's arms.

"Do you remember the mountains? Do you remember how we loved one another? How intensely we loved one another! Do you remember the light

on things and the glory of things? I'm greedy, I'm greedy! I want children like the mountains and life like the sky. Oh! and love--love! We've had so splendid a time, and fought our fight and won. And it's like the petals falling from a flower. Oh, I've loved love, dear! I've loved love and you, and the glory of you; and the great time is over, and I have to go carefully and bear children, and--take care of my hair--and when I am done with that I shall be an old woman. The petals have fallen--the red petals we loved so. We're hedged about with discretions--and all this furniture--and successes! We are successful at last! Successful! But the mountains, dear! We won't forget the mountains, dear, ever. That shining slope of snow, and how we talked of death! We might have died! Even when we are old, when we are rich as we may be, we won't forget the tune when we cared nothing for anything but the joy of one another, when we risked everything for one another, when all the wrappings and coverings seemed to have fallen from life and left it light and fire. Stark and stark! Do you remember it all?... Say you will never forget! That these common things and secondary things sha'n't overwhelm us. These petals! I've been wanting to cry all the evening, cry here on your shoulder for my petals. Petals!... Silly woman!... I've never had these crying fits before...."

"Blood of my heart!" whispered Capes, holding her close to him. "I know. I understand."